

Assessment of the Eutrophication Status and Related Ecological Quality Objectives for the North-East Atlantic

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The Oslo-Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), calls for a reduction of inputs (in the order of 50 %) of phosphorus and nitrogen into marine areas where these inputs are likely to cause pollution. Specifically, the OSPAR Strategy to Combat Eutrophication charges member countries to 1) assess the eutrophication status of OSPAR maritime areas by the year 2002 and, 2) combat eutrophication in order to achieve a healthy marine environment where eutrophication does not occur by 2010.

The eutrophication assessment is following the Common Procedure for the Identification of the Eutrophication Status of the Maritime Area, a set of harmonised assessment criteria that allow a holistic and common assessment of the eutrophication status. Selected criteria cover all aspects of nutrient enrichment including nutrient inputs, concentrations, ratios, possible effects (algal blooms, oxygen deficiency, changes or kills in benthos and fish, algal toxins), and supporting environmental factors (e.g. weather/climate conditions, stratification). Through this process the OSPAR maritime area is being classified into areas which are considered to be problem, potential problem, or non-problem areas with regard to eutrophication. Repeated application should identify any change in the eutrophication status of a particular area. After the identification of the maritime areas for which actions are needed, these measures should comprise an integrated target-oriented and source-oriented approach to reduce or eliminate the anthropogenic causes of eutrophication. One main element of the target-oriented approach is the development of Ecological Quality Objectives, an integrated set of eutrophication related objectives aimed at avoiding harm to marine ecosystems.